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Goals as Content-Specific Standards for Evaluation of Romantic Commitment

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Goals as Content-Specific Standards for Evaluation of Romantic Commitment

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Abstract

Goals as Content-Specific Standards for Evaluation of Romantic Commitment

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This thesis examines the association between the role that an individual's partner and relationship alternatives play in his or her goal pursuits and the individual's commitment to his or her relationship. Individual's preference for others that aid in the achievement of his or her goals has been theoretically and empirically established (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). This thesis extends that work by examining the relation between multiple interpersonal dimensions of an individual's goal pursuits and his or her romantic commitment. Rusbult's (1980) investment model was used as a framework to develop a questionnaire that examined the degree to which an individual believed his or her partner facilitated, impeded, shared, and valued his or her goals, as well as whether the individual could accomplish the goal without his or her partner or if anyone other than his or her partner could help him or her to achieve the goal. It was hypothesized that individuals who believe that their partner facilitates and shares their goals, and that their alternative partners do not facilitate their goals, will be more committed to their relationship. These hypotheses were tested with a survey that asked participants to list three of their personal

goals and rate each of them on the six interpersonal goal dimensions, as well as complete measures of relationship satisfaction, investment, alternatives, and commitment. Participants were recruited and responded to the survey through the Amazon.com Mechanical Turk marketplace. The final sample included 475 individuals that were involved in a romantic relationship at the time survey. Two structural equation models were constructed to analyze the data. Primary findings show significant associations between several of the interpersonal goal dimensions and the constructs of the investment model. Results are addressed in the context of the relevant literature, with relationship evaluation serving as the suggested mechanism. Implications and future directions are then discussed.

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Introduction

When taking a car for a test drive, what characteristics do you look for to help you decide whether or not you should buy it? How many miles per gallon it gets? How many cup holders it has? Or perhaps the comfort that comes with a luxurious interior is an important criterion for you. There are also more basic characteristics you can consider, like how the safe the car is, or whether or not it will be dependable. All of these characteristics of the car, taken together with your knowledge of what is important to you, will shape your decision of whether or not to purchase the car. A few years later, a similar process takes place when you decide whether or not you should trade the car in for a newer model. You will take into account the characteristics of your current car that make it worth keeping (e.g., it is paid off and still runs) and weigh them against the characteristics of the new car you are considering (e.g., good gas mileage). This, in fact, roughly follows a general model of the decision making process (Slade, 1994). Central to this model is the evaluation of options, which, in the test drive example, include your assessment of how comfortable you feel in the car, its safety rating, and its gas mileage. This model of the decision making process applies not only to car buying decisions, but to virtually all thoughtful decisions than an individual makes, including those about their relationships. Mirroring the process of evaluating a car, individuals must evaluate their options for romantic partners and relationships and decide which is the best option for him or herself. How individuals make those evaluations is a matter of some scrutiny by relationship scientists, and is the focus of this paper.

While evaluations may not be explicitly studied in every subfield of relationship science, they are actually fundamental to most models and theories thereof. Without the "mental arithmetic" (T. Loving, personal communication, April, 2013) of evaluating

potential partners, partners, and relationships, there can be no attraction, satisfaction, commitment, or any of the other constructs present in the existing relationship science literature. The way in which individual's evaluate their relationships is inalienable from the study of relationships in that, whether it is happening in the conscious form of a cost-benefit analysis or happening at an automatic level that is not apparent to the conscious mind, evaluations are ever-present and shape all relationship decisions. This ubiquity is precisely why it is so important to understand the standards, characteristics, or criteria that inform individual's evaluations of their partners and relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A wide variety of evaluative criteria have been examined in the psychological study of relationships. The degree of perceived similarity between the individual and the partner (Byrne, Griffitt, & Stefaniak, 1967; Singh, Lin, Tan, & Ho, 2008), how well the partner compares to the individual's ideal partner (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011), and the individual's level of self-esteem (DeHart, Pelham, & Murray, 2004) have all been used to explain individual's evaluations of potential partners. These studies, and much of the existing work on attraction, have sought to understand why individuals are drawn to some potential partners and not to others. The examined evaluative criteria have been interpersonal (e.g., level of similarity), internal (e.g., level of self-esteem), or external (e.g., facial symmetry of the potential partner; Burriss, Roberts, Welling, Puts, & Little, 2011), but all have been shown to meaningfully influence how appealing an individual finds a potential partner.

Similarly, evaluations made of ongoing relationships, and specifically whether or not they are worth maintaining, have been studied in great detail, usually under the label of commitment. A considerable number of evaluative criteria for relationships have been

examined, including the individual's behavior in the relationship (Lambert, Negash, Stillman, Olmstead, & Fincham, 2012), the way the partners communicate their commitment (Ackerman, Griskevicius, & Li, 2011), and the individual's attachment style (Joel, MacDonald, & Shimotomai, 2011). All of the criteria listed above, and many more, have been found to meaningfully shape an individual's evaluation of their partner or relationship (at least under certain parameters or in a specific context), and those evaluations are the basis of all thoughtful relationship decisions. The aim of the current line of research is to explore how an individual's goals and their partner's ability, or inability, to help the individual achieve those goals may serve as evaluative criteria in romantic relationships.

The study of goals and motivation is a well-established area of the personality and social psychology literature. There has been an extensive amount of investigation into many facets of goal pursuits (see Austin & Vancouver (1996) for a comprehensive review). Because of this large and diverse body of work, a number of individual, but related, definitions of goals have emerged. Emmons refers to the "four major constructs" of goal psychology: current concerns, personal projects, life tasks, and personal strivings (1997, p. 492). Each of these has aspects that differentiates it from the others (e.g., the time frame of the goal), but all together they cover a vast amount of possible goals. The definition of goals offered by Austin and Vancouver, which can include all of the four constructs described above, is: "internal representations of desired states, where states are broadly construed as outcomes, events, or processes" (1996, p. 338). With this definition as a starting point, the existing goal psychology literature most relevant to the current work will be reviewed.

One of the earliest theories in the area of goal pursuit (Lewin, 1935) suggests that an individual's perception of people, places, and situations can be colored by the ability,

or inability, of that object to aid in completion of the individual's goals. Subsequent studies have shown that individual's rate those who they believe can facilitate their goals more favorably and draw closer to them than those whom they do not rate as instrumental for their goals (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). Similarly, Fitzsimons and Fishbach (2010) found an association between an individual's goal progress and their preference for instrumental and non-instrumental others, such that once a goal had been achieved the individual no longer showed a preference for instrumental others. The complement of those findings, the association between dissimilar goals and conflict, is discussed at length by Fitzsimons and Anderson (2011), who found that similar academic achievement goals in undergraduate couples were associated with less conflict across time, suggesting that conflicting goals may indeed lead to conflict in a relationship.

The converse of those findings, the impact of an individual's relationships on their goal progress, has also been examined. Fitzsimons and Bargh (2003) found that priming individuals with a specific relationship led them to engage in goal directed behavior specific to goals linked to that relationship. Similarly, Shah (2003) found that the degree of closeness in a relationship and the number of goals linked to that relationship moderate the effect that priming an individual with that relationship has on the individual's goal directed behavior. Taken together, these studies suggest a strong, bi-directional association between goal pursuits and interpersonal relationships.

A number of studies outside the specific context of romantic relationships have shown that there is a meaningful relationship between an individual's goal progress and his or her well-being (see Emmons, 1996 for a review). Presumably, this is because of the importance that individuals place on achieving their goals (Brunstein, 1993). As one may guess, significant others play a meaningful role in the individual's goal progress. For example, Ruehlman and Wolchik (1988) found a significant relationship between the

support and the hindrance of personal goals by the three most important people in an individual's life and the individual's well-being and distress, respectively. It should also be noted that the strongest effects of support and hindrance were shown for the person whom the individual listed as the most important to him or her. The influence that an individual's significant others have on their goal progress has also been shown to be important to the well-being of the relationship. Brunstein, Danglemayer, and Schultheiss (1996) found that both provision and receipt of support for goal pursuits were positively associated with spouses' marital satisfaction. Likewise, Kaplan and Maddux (2002) found that the perceived support of the individual's personal goals and the belief that the couple was capable of achieving their joint goals were both positively and uniquely related to marital satisfaction.

That, through the pursuit of their goals, individuals may develop "a general evaluative preference for instrumental others" is suggested by Fitzsimons and Fishbach (2010, p. 536). This echoes the proposal of Read and Miller (1989) that the individual's perception of the goal facilitating resources brought to the relationship by their partner may sway how the individual feels about the relationship. Following from this work, the current line of research proposes that the mechanism through which goal facilitation impacts relationships is by altering the individual's evaluation of their partner. Emmons (1999) argues that this influence is most-likely happening at both conscious and sub-conscious levels, which may make the effect even more powerful. If this is the case, the effect of shifting evaluative preferences should be seen beyond the satisfaction and well-being outcomes examined by most previous studies. That is, if the role that an individual's partner plays in their goal pursuits is meaningfully changing the individual's evaluation of his or her relationship, then it should be evident in not only how the individual's rate their satisfaction with the relationship, but also in the way the individual

rates other aspects of his or her relationship, like the resources he or she is willing to expend in the relationship and the attention that the individual pays to other possible romantic partners. In order to understand the breadth and depth of the impact of goal pursuits on relationships, the current study examined the association between the partner's role in an individual's goal pursuits and the individual's commitment to the relationship through the lens of the investment model.

The investment model (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998), which grew out of Thibaut and Kelley's interdependence theory (1959), offers an equation for understanding an individual's commitment to a romantic relationship. Similar to interdependence theory, the investment model includes in its calculation of commitment how satisfied the individual is with the relationship and the quality of the individual's available alternatives to the relationship. The investment model's calculation of commitment also includes the amount that an individual has invested in his or her relationship, or what the individual would lose should the relationship end, and the quality of available alternatives to the relationship. As levels of satisfaction and investment increase, and the quality of available alternatives deceases, the investment model proposes that commitment should increase. Analyses confirm the presence and direction of these hypothesized associations and that the investment model (as measured by the investment model scale; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) explains as much as 77% of the variance in commitment. This impressive predictive power, along with the elegant simplicity of the model, has earned it high levels of esteem in psychology and other fields. Another reason for that high esteem is that the investment model has spurred much investigation of its concepts, and that investigation has yielded important and interesting findings. One path for further investigation that has been noted is that, though interdependence theory (and, by extension, the investment model) does not elucidate how

"individuals may evaluate their partners or relationships on content-specific standards or dimensions." (Campbell and Ellis, 2005, p. 426), it does provide a framework through which researchers can understand and explore content-specific standards for relationship evaluation.

Given this, and the above review of the goal pursuit literature, the current line of research aims to establish the interpersonal dimensions of an individual's goal pursuits as evaluative criteria for commitment through their relation to satisfaction, investment, and alternatives. The existing literature relevant to this idea suggests that facilitation (or the degree to which an individual believes their partner can help them achieve their goal) should be the primary interpersonal dimension considered and it has received the lion's share of attention from researchers. Other plausible dimensions, including whether or not the goal is shared by the partner and the degree to which someone other than the partner can facilitate their goals, were developed using the framework of the investment model. The primary model proposed in this study (the general model) is exploratory in nature given that beyond the association between facilitation and satisfaction, the link between these additional dimensions and the constructs of satisfaction, investment, alternatives, and commitment is not well established. A more parsimonious second model (the specific model) is being proposed based on several theoretical assumptions to test associations between specific dimensions and constructs of the investment model.

It should be noted that, regardless of which model is being discussed, certain factors are expected to hold true. First, in order for the interpersonal dimensions of an individual's goal pursuit to affect their evaluations of their relationship, the goal in question must be currently active. This corresponds to the work of Fitzsimons and Fishbach (2010) that found that individual's evaluative preference for instrumental others disappeared once the goal for which the other was instrumental had been achieved.

Second, the interpersonal dimensions of an individual's goal pursuits for goals that the individual deems more important should, all other things being equal, affect their evaluation of their relationship more than the interpersonal dimensions of a goal that individual deems less important. To say this another way, the goal must be important to the individual for it to have an impact on how they feel about their relationship. With these common factors in the mind, the proposed models will now be discussed.

The first model in this study (the general model) examines the associations between the degree to which an individual believes that their partner facilitates and shares their goals, and the degree to which the individual believes that their alternatives can facilitate their goals, and how committed the individual is to their relationship. A graphical depiction of general model is presented in Figure 1. It was hypothesized i) that facilitation of goals will be positively related to commitment through the constructs of the investment model, ii) that sharing of goals will be positively related to commitment through the constructs of the investment model, and iii) that facilitation by alternatives will be negatively related to commitment through the constructs of the investment model. For example, an individual who has an important and active goal for himself of owning a home should evaluate his relationship more favorably if his partner i) contributes to a joint savings account for a down payment, ii) shares the goal of owning a home and also believes it to be an important goal, and iii) if he has no relationship alternatives that could also help him to achieve that goal. All three hypotheses fall generally in line with the assertion of Fitzsimons and Fishbach that "goals cause people to feel more global positivity about instrumental others and more global negativity about noninstrumental others" (2010, p. 536). The general model is designed to parse out which goal dimensions carry more evaluative weight, and which carry less.

The second model examined in this study (the specific model) was constructed as a more parsimonious alternative to the first. A graphical depiction of the specific model is presented in Figure 2. Hypotheses investigated in the specific model are i) that individuals who believe that their partner facilitates their goals with be more satisfied with their relationship, ii) that individuals who believe their partner shares their goals will be more invested in their relationship, and iii) that individuals who believe their alternatives to the relationship (including being alone) can help them achieve their goals will rate their alternatives more favorably. Furthermore, it is hypothesized iv) that each of the goal dimensions will be significantly related to commitment, but that relation will be mediated by the connected investment model construct (e.g., the relation between facilitation and commitment will be mediated by satisfaction).The existing literature supports the idea of goal facilitation being predictive of satisfaction, as numerous studies (Brunstein, Danglemayer, & Schultheiss, 1996; Kaplan & Maddux, 2002) have found that association. While the hypothesized relations between shared goals and investment and goal facilitation by alternatives and evaluation of alternatives have not (to the knowledge of the author) been explicitly examined to date, there are theoretical reasons to believe that the association will be significant.

Shared goals, for instance, represent something that would, most likely, be lost if the relationship were to end. A couple that has agreed to save money with the goal of purchasing a home has established a shared goal. If that couple separates, the hope of achieving that shared goal (at least as it was originally constituted) has been lost. In this way, shared goals are in-line with the investment model's definition of investment: a resource that cannot be retrieved should the relationship end. It is reasonable to expect that an individual may measure their investment in the relationship in part by considering their shared goals.

For reasons similar to those cited in existing literature on the association between facilitation and satisfaction, the degree to which alternatives to the relationship can help an individual achieve his or her goals should be positively related to the individual's evaluation of his or her alternatives. Individual's "evaluative preference for instrumental others" (Fitzsimons & Fishbach, 2010, p. 536) is likely extend to others who represent available alternatives to the relationship. The theory would suggest that, all other things being equal, an available alternative to relationship that can facilitate the individual's goals should be rated more positively than an alternative that cannot facilitate the individual's goals. For example, an individual who wants to run a marathon should evaluate their alternatives to the relationship more favorably if one of those alternatives can help him or her achieve the goal of finishing a marathon.

In order to investigate these hypotheses, a questionnaire was constructed by the author and completed by individuals that were currently involved in a romantic relationship. Participants were asked to list three of their primary goals, and then to rate each of those goals on seven dimensions, as well as to respond to questions about their relationship. The associations between participants' ratings of their most important and salient goal and their relationship were then examined using structural equation modeling based on the two models described above.

Method

Procedure

In order to examine the associations between an individual's goal pursuits and their commitment to their relationship, a cross-sectional survey was constructed and administered through the Amazon.com Mechanical Turk (mTurk) marketplace, which is an online forum where 'workers' can be paid for online 'tasks' such as completing a survey. In order to be eligible to complete the survey, participants were required to be at least 18 years of age and currently involved in a romantic relationship. The survey was administered online using Qualtrics Survey Software, and took participants, on average, 12 minutes to complete. Participants were paid $1.00 for submitting a completed survey, which is a rate commensurate with comparable 'tasks' on mTurk.

After reading the informed consent document on the first page of the survey and agreeing to participate, participants began the survey. On the first page after the informed consent, participants were instructed to list "three of your primary goals for yourself." After completing this, participants were asked to rate each of the three goals that they listed on seven dimensions. In order to ensure that there was no confusion, the goal dimension ratings for each goal were completed on separate pages of the survey and the goal in question was listed for the participant at the top of the page. After completing the goal dimension ratings for all three goals, participants completed measures of relationship commitment, satisfaction, investment, and alternatives. After completing the last page of the survey, participants were given a randomly generated confirmation code which they were instructed to enter when submitting the mTurk 'task'. Participants who submitted the task with the appropriate confirmation code were paid within one week of submission.

PARTICIPANTS

After removing surveys that were missing substantial portions of data (i.e., one entire scale or more), and those that failed to accurately complete the attention checks, 475 surveys remained (i.e., N = 475). Participants had a mean age of 32.5 years, and had a mean relationship length of 7.6 years. 62% of the participants were female, 83% identified as White, 7% as African American, 7% as Asian American, and 5% as Hispanic or Latino. The sample was highly educated, with 50% of the sample having a four year college degree or more, and 48% of the sample was employed full time. Approximately 37% of the sample reported their annual household income as between $20,000 and $49,999, approximately 34% of the sample reported their annual household income as between $50,000 and $99,999, and approximately 14% of the sample reported their annual household income as $100,000 or more.

MEASURES

Goal Items

The goal dimension items completed by participants (followed by the title used in this paper for that dimension) were: "How important is it to you that you achieve this goal?" (*importance),* "How much does your partner help you achieve this goal?" (*facilitation),* "How much does your partner impede your progress on this goal?" (*impediment*), "Is this goal an individual goal for yourself or a shared goal for you and your partner together (NOT a similar goal that your partner separately has for him or herself)?" (*shared),* "How important is it to your partner that the goal you listed is achieved?" (*importance to partner),* "Would you be able to achieve this goal if you were no longer in a relationship with your partner?" (*without partner),* "How much can

someone other than your partner help you to achieve this goal?" (*with alternatives)*. A table of the goal dimension items, along with their title, can be seen in Table 1.

Each of the dimensions was rated on a seven point Likert-type scale with anchors appropriate to the question. The goal dimensions from each participant's most important goal were included in the models as observed variables. By collecting three goals from all participants, it was anticipated that each participant would list at least one goal which was important to him or her and active at the time of the survey. Having each participant list at least one important and active goal was important for two reasons. First, all other things being equal, important goals should be more likely to alter evaluations than unimportant goals. Second, as discussed earlier, the role of a given goal in shaping evaluations is diminished when that goal becomes inactive (Fitzsimons & Fishbach, 2010). If all three goals were rated by the participant as equally important, the first goal listed by that participant and the corresponding goal dimension ratings were used for that participant. If the second and third goals listed were rated as equally important, but both as more important than the first, the second goal listed and its corresponding goal dimension ratings were used for that participant. The rationale for this was that the goals listed earlier should be more salient than goals listed later, and so the goal dimensions taken for each participant were either from their most important goal or from an equally important and more salient goal.

This approach was taken because it represents the most precise test of the stated hypotheses. There is no theoretical reason to believe that all three of an individual's listed goals should be facilitated or shared equally by their partner or alternatives, so averaging goal dimensions across all three goals or including the goal dimensions of all three goals

individually could muddle the results[1]. For example, an individual with a partner who facilitates one goal, but not another, would be lumped together with an individual who rated their partner as somewhat facilitating two of their goals, even though those are theoretically meaningful differences. Focusing on one distinct goal prevents this issue. Furthermore, by using only the dimensions from an individual's most important[2] (or an equally important and more salient) goal, the power of a single, self-generated goal to alter individual's evaluation of their relationship could be examined.

The means and standard deviations for the dimensions of each participants most important (or equally important but more salient goal) were as follows: *importance* (M = 6.9; SD = .04), *facilitation* (M = 5.3; SD = 1.7), *impediment* (M = 2.4; SD = 1.6), *shared* (M = 4.0; SD = 2.6), *importance to partner* (M = 5.5; SD = 1.7), *without partner* (M = 5.3; SD = 1.9), and *with alternatives* (M = 4.1; SD = 2.0).

The Investment Model and Additional Measures

The measure of relationship commitment completed by participants consisted of two items that were taken from the commitment scale given in Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew (1998;"I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner" and "I want our relationship to last for a very long time") and were measured on a nine point Likert-type scale (M = 8.3, SD = 1.5). The measure of relationship satisfaction was the 16 item version of the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI; M = 79.8, SD = 15.3; Funk & Rogge, 2007). The CSI was included in the questionnaire instead of the satisfaction portion of the

[1]Preliminary analyses used averages of goal dimensions across all three listed goals, dimensions from all three listed goals included individually, and only dimensions from the first goal listed (which was, generally, also rated as the most important) as predictor variables. All models yielded comparable results to the final model.

[2] The process of extracting each participant's most important goal resulted in a mean importance level of the goal used in analyses of 6.9 out of 7 with a standard deviation of .04, which is notably higher than the first goal (M = 6.6, SD =.75), second goal (M = 6.5, SD = .86), or third goal (M = 6.3, SD = 1.0).

investment model scale (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) because the CSI is an extremely psychometrically sound measure of satisfaction. The measures of relationship investment (M = 5.3, SD = 1.3) and alternatives to the relationship (M = 2.9, SD = 1.4) were both taken in their entirety from Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998). Participants also completed the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) scale (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992), a basic two item measure of depressive symptoms, and individual and relationship demographic information.

DATA ANALYSIS

In order to test the hypotheses, two structural equation models were built. Minimum recommended sample size (N = 500; Bollen, 1989) was almost reached, but insufficient power did not appear to be a problem in any iteration of the analyses. There are a number of similarities between the two models, which will be discussed before the differences between the two models are explained. Latent variables in both models were satisfaction, investment, alternatives, and commitment. In both models each of those latent variables was defined by the appropriate scale (investment and alternatives were both defined by their respective global subscales, though the facet subscales were also collected, per the recommendation of Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998)). Satisfaction, investment, and alternatives were used as predictor variables for commitment, and all three were allowed to correlate with each other in both models. All goal dimensions were allowed to correlate with all other goal dimensions, and to directly and indirectly predict commitment in both models. Gender, age, and relationship length were included as covariates in both models.

The general model was constructed to find the goal dimensions with the greatest evaluative impact by testing all possible paths from all goal dimensions to commitment

through the constructs of the investment model, such that *facilitation*, *impediment*, *shared*, *importance to partner*, *without partner* and, *with alternatives* were all included in the model as predictors of the investment model constructs of satisfaction, investment, and alternatives. All goal dimensions were also allowed to directly predict commitment and to indirectly predict commitment through any of the investment model constructs.

The specific model would then test the hypothesized paths from goal dimensions through the constructs of the investment model to commitment. The f*acilitation* and *impediment* goal dimensions were the only goal dimension predictors of the investment model construct of satisfaction, and were allowed to directly and indirectly (through satisfaction) predict commitment. The *shared* and *importance to partner* goal dimensions were the only goal dimension predictors of the investment model construct of investment, and were allowed to directly and indirectly (through investment) predict commitment. The *without partner* and *with alternatives* goal dimensions were the only goal dimension predictors of the investment model construct of alternatives, and were allowed to directly and indirectly (through alternatives) predict commitment.

Results

THE GENERAL MODEL

A graphical depiction of all of the significant paths and the corresponding coefficients in the general model is provided in Figure 3. Analysis of the general model revealed an RMSEA of .063, a CFI of .92, with an R^2 of commitment of .69, and an Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) of 44,191.145. The three latent variables of satisfaction, investment, and alternatives were all highly significant predictors of commitment in the hypothesized directions. The goal dimensions of *facilitation, impediment,* and *with alternatives* were all significant predictors of the latent variable of satisfaction, while the goal dimensions of *shared, importance to partner*, and *without partner* were not. All together the goal dimensions explained 25% of the variance in the latent variable of satisfaction. *Facilitation, impediment,* and, *with alternatives* were all significant indirect predictors of commitment through the latent variable of satisfaction, but none were significant direct predictors of commitment. The goal dimensions of *facilitation, without partner,* and *with alternatives* were all significant predictors of the latent variable of investment, while *impediment, shared,* and *importance to partner* were not. All together the goal dimensions explained 25% of the variance in the latent variable of investment. *Facilitation, without partner,* and *with alternatives* were all significant indirect predictors of commitment through the latent variable of investment, but none were significant direct predictors of commitment. The goal dimensions of *facilitation, impediment, without partner,* and *with alternatives* were all highly significant predictors of the latent variable of alternatives, while *shared* and *importance to partner* were not. All together the goal dimensions explained 26% of the variance in the latent variable of alternatives. *Facilitation, impediment, without partner,* and *with alternatives* were all significant indirect predictors of commitment through the latent variable of alternatives,

but none were significant direct predictors of commitment. See Table 1 for a table of standardized coefficients of the significant paths from the goal dimensions to the constructs of the investment model, and indirectly through those constructs to commitment.

THE SPECIFIC MODEL

See Figure 4 for a graphical depiction of the specific model with all direct path coefficients included. Analysis of the specific model revealed an RMSEA of .064, a CFI of .92, an R^2 of commitment of .67, and an AIC of 44,249.563. The three latent variables of satisfaction, investment, and alternatives were all highly significant predictors of commitment in the hypothesized directions. The goal dimensions of *facilitation* and *impediment* were both highly significant predictors of the latent variable of satisfaction, explaining 15% of the variance in satisfaction. Both *facilitation* and *impediment* were significant indirect predictors of commitment through the latent variable of satisfaction, but neither was a significant direct predictor of commitment. The goal dimensions of *shared* and *importance to partner* were both significant predictors of the latent variable of investment, explaining 15% of the variance in investment. Both *shared* and *importance to partner* were significant indirect predictors of commitment through the latent variable of investment, but neither was a significant direct predictor of commitment. The goal dimension of *without partner* was a highly significant predictor of the latent variable of alternatives, but the goal dimension of *with alternatives* was not, and together they explained 13% of the variance in the latent variable of alternatives. *Without partner* was a significant indirect predictor of commitment, but *with alternatives* was not, and neither was a significant direct predictor of commitment.

Discussion

The findings described above indicate that there was an association between how individuals think about their partner's (and their alternative's) role in their goal pursuits and how they evaluated their relationship. Those interpersonal dimensions of an individual's goal pursuits were associated with how individuals rated their satisfaction with, investment in, and alternatives to their relationship. In the general model the goal dimensions of *facilitation, impediment, without partner,* and *with alternatives* were all strongly related to at least two of those constructs, but *facilitation* was the most strongly related to all three of the relationship constructs. The goal dimensions of *shared* and *importance to partner* were not meaningfully related to any of the three constructs. In the specific model the goal dimensions of *facilitation* and *impediment* were both related to the construct of satisfaction, *shared* and *importance to partner* were both related to the construct of investment, and *without partner*, but not *with alternatives*, was related to the construct of alternatives. As predicted by the investment model, the constructs of satisfaction, investment, and alternatives were all strongly related to the individual's report of their commitment to the relationship.

In the current study, the investment model served as a framework through which different dimensions of the partner's, and alternative's, role in the individual's goal pursuits were examined as evaluative criteria for commitment. Using this framework and the existing literature related to the subject, six interpersonal goal dimensions on which any of an individual's goals can be rated were developed. The general model was constructed to examine the roles that all six dimensions play in an individual's evaluation of their satisfaction, investment, alternatives, and commitment. The specific model was constructed to examine hypothesized associations between goal dimensions and the

constructs of the investment model. Analysis of the general model indicated that the hypothesized associations between the dimensions of *shared* and *importance to partner* and the construct of investment were not supported, and that the associations between the other goal dimensions and the non-hypothesized investment model constructs should be investigated further. Given the lack of significance of many of the hypothesized pathways in the general model, the specific model, while showing decent fit, is inherently incorrect and the general model should be preferred over the specific model. Despite this, analysis of both models was carried out so that the original hypotheses could be examined and compared to the general model.

The two models were analyzed using data from a cross-sectional survey of 475 individuals. Analyses revealed similar fit statistics and explanatory power for the latent variable of commitment, which suggests that both models are viable options. The two models start to diverge when the explanatory power for the latent variables of satisfaction, investment, and alternatives are considered. The amount of variance explained in the latent variables of satisfaction, investment, and alternatives is significantly higher in the general model than in the specific model (All $Fs > 15$, All $ps < .001$). The AIC also suggests that the general model (44,191.145) is superior to the specific mode (44,249.563). When trying to account for this divergence, it becomes clear that the dimension of *facilitation* plays a key role.

Even before conducting this study there was reason to believe that the degree to which an individual's partner facilitates their goals may be a primary evaluative criterion. For instance, the "general evaluative preference for instrumental others" described by Fitzsimons and Fishbach (2010, p. 536) speaks directly to the importance of facilitation in altering evaluations, but ignores the other dimensions. The emphasis on facilitation has actually been a pattern in much of the existing work in this area going all the way back to

Lewin's theorizing in 1935. It could be even argued the dimensions of *shared* and *importance to partner* are dependent on the primary question of *facilitation*. For example, whether or not the goal is shared by the individual's partner may be important only in as much as the partner is more likely to facilitate a goal that he or she shares with individual than a goal that he or she does not share. To say this in a slightly different way, does a goal that is shared by one's partner, but not facilitated by that partner, really represent a resource that would be lost? Perhaps the mere sharing of a goal is not positively related to satisfaction, investment, alternatives, or commitment when facilitation is also considered because a goal being shared is only a positive quality if that sharing leads to facilitation.

In the general model *facilitation* is the most highly predictive dimension for all of the latent variables. As discussed earlier, this falls in line with much of the existing literature and makes theoretical sense. In the specific model, *facilitation* has the strongest relationship of any goal dimension with its hypothesized investment model construct (i.e., satisfaction), but, as it is not allowed to predict investment or alternatives, its value for understanding those constructs is ignored. Second, in the general model the dimensions of *shared* and *importance to partner* are not significantly related to any of the latent variables of satisfaction, investment, and alternatives. This is valuable information, as the theorized association between these two dimensions and the construct of investment is supported in the specific model, but does not hold up under the more rigorous examination of the general model. Acceptance of the specific model could lead to faulty belief in the importance of the dimensions of *shared* and *importance to partner*, when they may in fact be largely dependent on the dimension of *facilitation*.

Third, there is a highly significant relation between the dimension of *with alternatives* and all three constructs of the investment model in the general model, but in the specific model the *with alternatives* dimension is not significantly related to even the

alternatives construct. The dimension of *with alternatives* could be considered a foil of the *facilitation* dimension, as it asks the same question, only with the focus on any alternative to the relationship rather than the individual's partner. So, for much the same reason as *facilitation* is important, there is theoretical reason to believe in its importance as an evaluative criterion, and consideration of only the specific model would lead to the faulty dismissal of that dimension. Given these findings, the general model may prove more fruitful and is, in the opinion of the author, more compelling as a starting place for the exploration of the role of goals as evaluative criteria of commitment.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Given the exploratory nature of the general model, there is a need to validate the hypothesized explanations for the superiority of the general model. This validation may include direct replication of this study examining the found, but not hypothesized associations and further investigation into the relations between the goal dimension items. For example, an exploratory factor analysis could be conducted to determine the relation between facilitation and the other goal dimension items.

There is also reason to be concerned about the order in which participants completed the questionnaire. It is possible that, by having the participants list their goals and rate them on the goal dimensions before completing measures of relationship satisfaction, investment, alternatives, and commitment, participants were primed to consider their relationships through the lens of their goal pursuits and so the associations between the goal dimensions and the relationship measures were artificially inflated. In order to investigate this possibility another sample should be recruited to complete the questionnaire. Half of that sample should be randomly assigned to complete the relationship measures first and the goal dimension items second, while the other half

completes the questionnaire in the original order. A significantly stronger association between the goal dimension items and the relationship measures in the half completing the originally ordered questionnaire would suggest that participants were in fact being primed by the goal items. This possibility, while troubling, does not necessarily negate the work described in this paper. The goal dimension items were proposed as one set of possible evaluative criteria, but there are certainly others. If the associations between the goal dimension items and the relationship constructs is not as strong if the order of the questionnaire is changed, it would mean that other evaluative criteria are being used, not that the goal dimensions are not a useful set of evaluative criteria.

In order to expand the study described above, the goal descriptions should be categorized according to the properties of the listed goals. The dichotomous categories on which the goals could be coded include whether the goal is abstract or concrete, whether it is a relational or an individual goal, and the time perspective of the goal (i.e., finite or infinite). This type of goal coding is described in a paper by Emmons (1992), who found that more abstract goals are related to higher levels of depression. In the case of the current study, the inclination to list only individual goals may be related to being less invested in the relationship, or an interaction between time perspective and facilitation may be found, such that individual's with infinite goals that their partner facilitates may be more committed to the relationship than individual's with finite goals that their partner facilitates.

A longitudinal study could test whether changes in goal status (e.g., completing one goal and moving on to another) or shifts in the degree to which an individual feels their partner facilitates one goal is related to subsequent shifts in relationship satisfaction. Similarly, there may also be individual (or relationship level) differences related to the type of goals that are chosen. An individual who consistently chooses goals which their

partner can and will facilitate should, according to the results reported above, be more committed to their relationship than an individual who chooses goals that their partner cannot or will not facilitate. This association could be examined in a longitudinal study on individual's choice of goals and how that is related to their commitment, which may show that choosing goals with one's partner in mind could be a relationship maintenance behavior (Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2004) along the lines of the derogation of alternatives (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

Based on the current study, it can be argued that partner goal facilitation is positively related to satisfaction, investment, and commitment, and negatively related to beliefs about the quality of relationship alternatives, but that may be truer for some people than it is for others. It stands to reason that individuals who prefer that their relationship encompass all parts of their life (i.e., those who prefer a high score on the IOS; Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992) would be more likely to evaluate their relationship using any and all of their goals. It is possible that other individuals would use certain kinds of goals (e.g., family goals) to evaluate their relationship, but would ignore other goals (e.g., career goals) when evaluating their relationship. In other words, individuals in the latter category would not have their evaluations of their relationship swayed in any way by their partner's activity or inactivity in their pursuit of a goal falling into the ignored category (e.g., career goals). In the context of the current study, if any participants had listed goals with which they do not evaluate their partner, it would have hindered the association between the goal dimensions and the constructs of the investment model. Because there was a strong association between several of the goal dimensions and the constructs of the investment model, even when goal dimensions were averaged across all three goals, it does not appear that this was a problem. Still, the idea

of important individual differences in this area certainly merits further attention in the form of a study with this idea as a focal point.

The casual nature of the association between an individual's evaluations of their relationship and their partner's role in their goal pursuits should be tested by experimentally manipulating the degree to which an individual believes their partner can facilitate their goals and examining their subsequent evaluations of their partner. For example, by bringing couples in to the laboratory and providing them with an immediately accomplishable goal, then altering the degree to which one's partner is capable of assisting the other, some variation in evaluation of the relationship or partner caused by goal facilitation should be visible. This study format would also allow examination of how the importance of the goal influences the association between facilitation and evaluation (e.g., by increasing the reward for successfully completing the goal), and for how necessity of facilitation influences evaluation (e.g., by altering the task to be either easily accomplishable alone or impossible to complete without assistance).

The precise role of evaluation must also be further vetted. It is certainly worth noting that the current study does not represent an examination of evaluation per se, but rather that evaluation is the suggested mechanism for the association between the dimensions of an individual's partner's role in the individual's goal pursuits and the individual's commitment to the relationship. Fitzsimons and Fishbach (2010) suggested this idea, and it makes intuitive sense, but it still merits further attention. Because of the previously-described ubiquitous nature of evaluation in the decision making process, it may be difficult to tease apart additional mechanisms that operate outside of the evaluative process. It may be possible to examine this by designing a study in which individuals report one goal that is facilitated by their partner and one goal that is not, then randomly assigning individuals to write about either the facilitated or not facilitated goal.

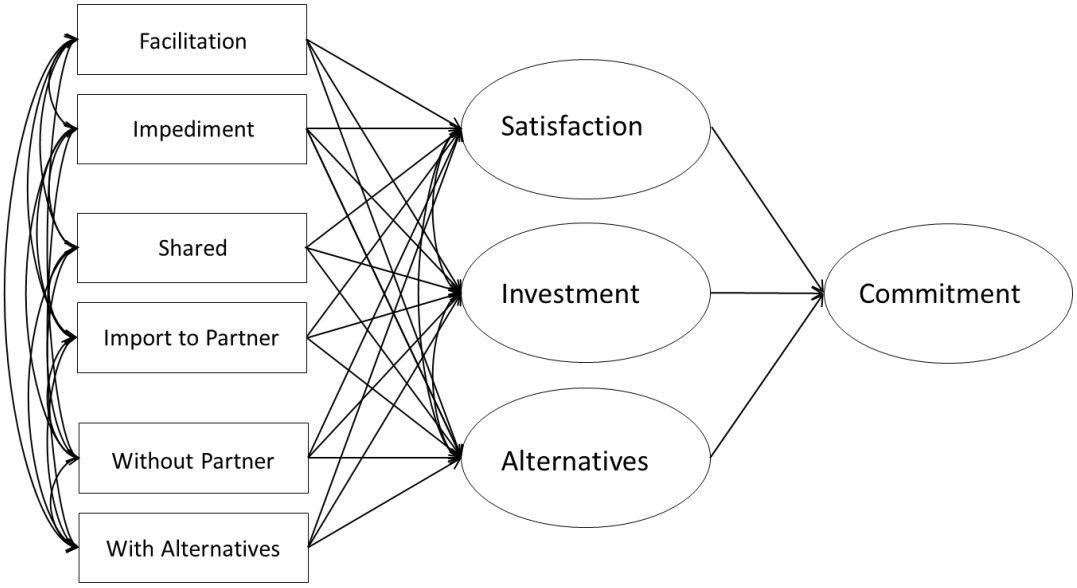
Any observed difference between the two conditions in relationship evaluations reported after that task would be evidence for goal facilitation playing a role in relationship evaluation. Future work could also develop our understanding of some of the intricacies of the association. For instance, it could examine whether the association between goal pursuits and evaluations of the relationship happen mostly on the level of what Kahneman (2011) refers to as System 1 thinking (automatic, effortless, and intuitive) or System 2 thinking (attentive, effortful, and concerted). An investigation of this nature could further our understanding of how much control needs to be exercised for individuals to evaluate their relationship using their goal pursuits (and perhaps other evaluative criteria, as well), and should help direct future applications of this idea.

There is also significant potential for clinical application of the ideas presented in this paper. The identification and examination of content-specific dimensions for evaluation lends itself quite naturally to clinical work in that goal dimensions represent something concrete that counselors and therapists can target to help couples . For example, a therapist could assign to each individual as 'homework' the task of finding a goal of his or her partner's that the individual can and will facilitate. If one or both partners cannot, or will not, complete this assignment that is certainly pertinent clinical information. If the assignment is completed, each partner has, on their own, come up with an activity that should make their partner feel more positively about the relationship. The goal dimensions also represent a new set of questions that clinicians can offer to individuals who are working to identify the best course for the future of their relationship. In this way, the findings described above, and the search for evaluative criteria in general, represents not only a step forward in the basic understanding of relationships, but also a potential application of that basic understanding to help improve relationships.

CONCLUSION

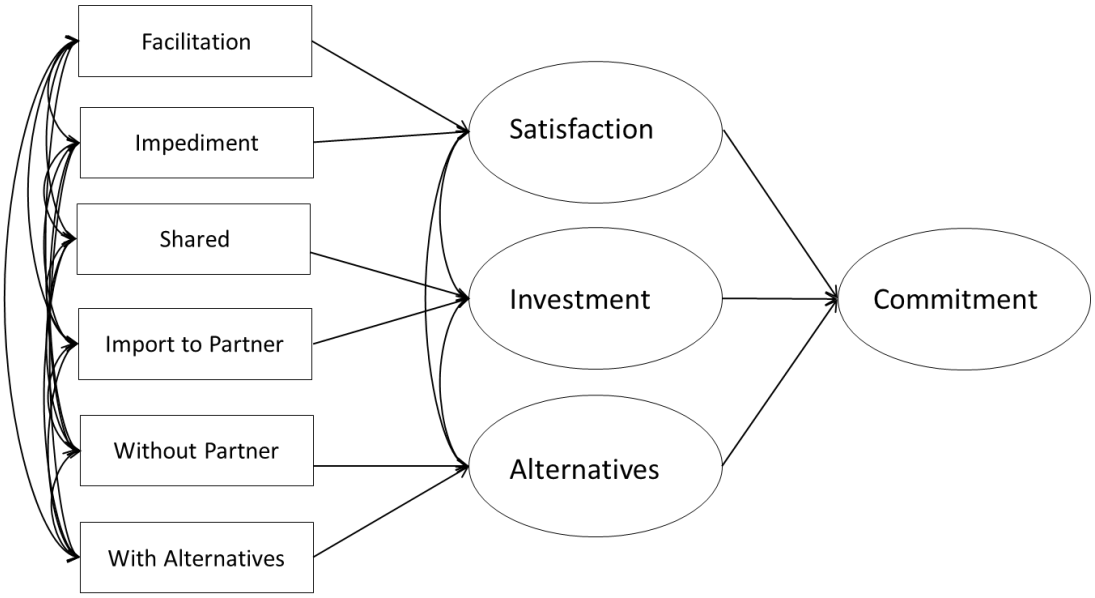
In the search for evaluative criteria, the limited value of any single criterion becomes apparent. Neither this paper, nor any of the others seeking to explain how individuals evaluate their relationships, suggests that the criterion (or criteria) examined offers a complete picture and total explanatory power. The existing literature cited above suggests that the role that an individual's partner plays in the individual's goal pursuits may be an especially important set of evaluative criteria. Previous literature had not explored the idea that those evaluative criteria may be employed in the domain of romantic commitment. By using the investment model, a well-known framework for understanding romantic commitment, this study was able to examine the association between six interpersonal dimensions of an individual's goal pursuits and three major facets of romantic commitment. The degree to which an individual believes that their partner facilitates their goals was found to be strongly associated with how the individual rates their satisfaction with the relationship, their investment in the relationship, and their alternatives to the relationship. Given this, in addition to the existing theoretical and empirical support for the importance of goal pursuits in relationships, there is reason to believe that people evaluate their partners and relationships based on the interpersonal dimensions of their goal pursuits. The specific, yet pliable, nature of the goal dimensions makes this an exciting prospect for future research and application.

Figure 1



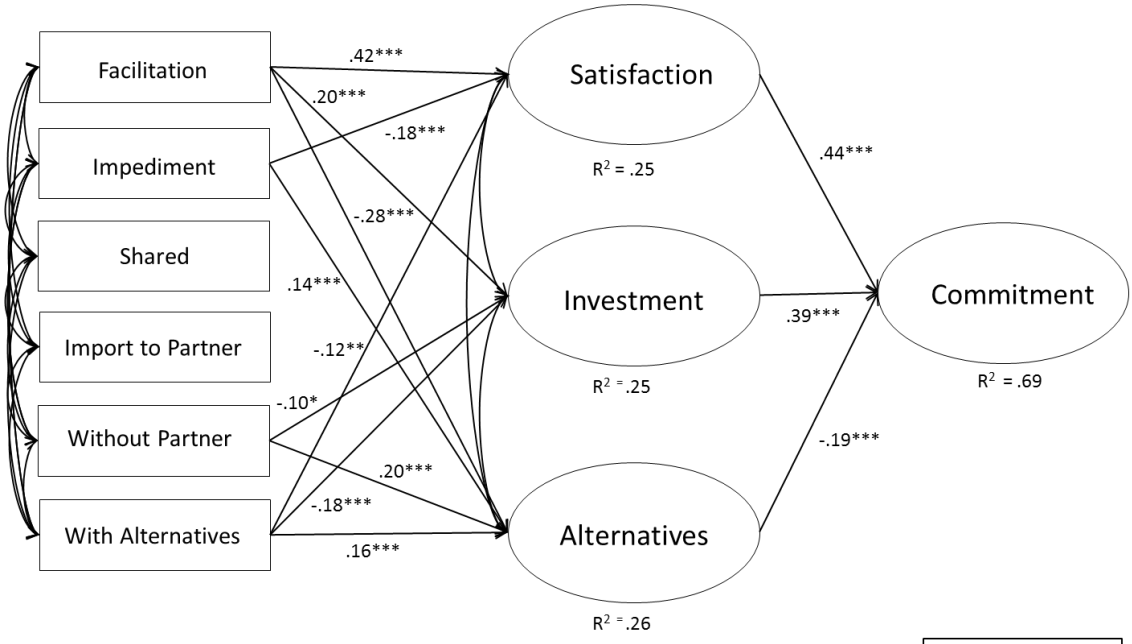
Model 1: The
General Model

Figure 2



Model 2: The
Specific Model

Figure 3

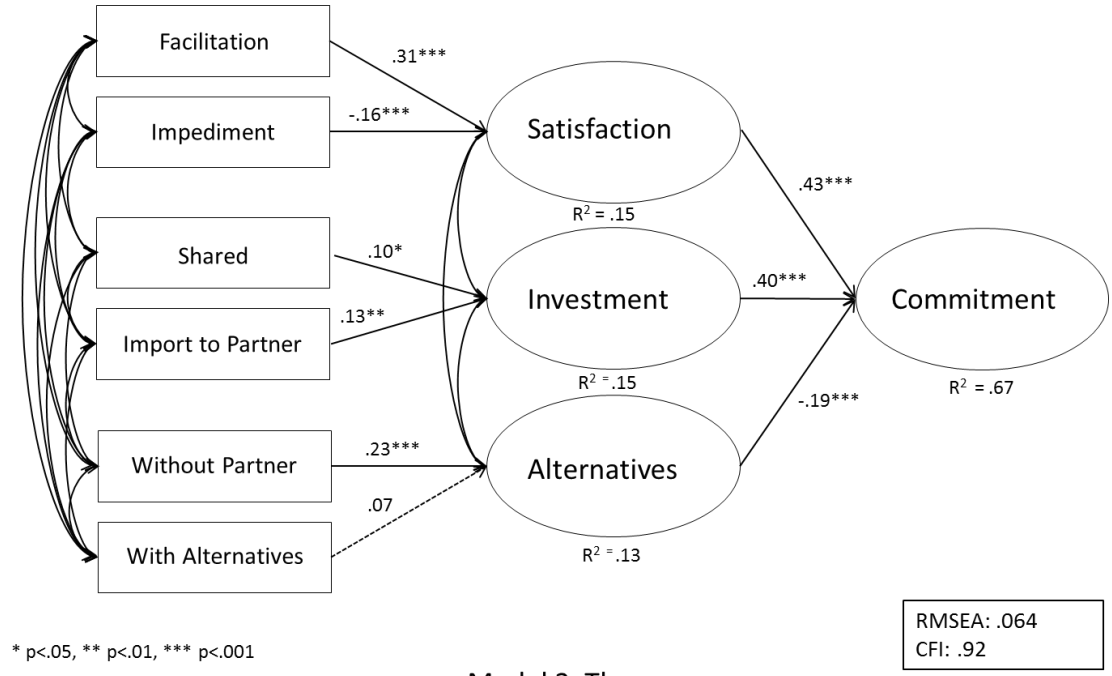


* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Note: For legibility, only significant paths are displayed in this figure.

Model 1: The General Model

Figure 4



Model 2: The Specific Model

Table 1

Goal Dimension Title	Item Text	Mean	Standard Deviation
Importance	How important is it to you that you achieve this goal?	6.9	.04
Facilitation	How much does your partner help you achieve this goal?	5.3	1.7
Impediment	How much does your partner impede your progress on this goal?	2.4	1.6
Shared	Is this goal an individual goal for yourself or a shared goal for you and your partner together (NOT a similar goal that your partner separately has for him or herself)?	4.0	2.6
Importance to Partner	How important is it to your partner that the goal you listed is achieved?	5.5	1.7
Without Partner	Would you be able to achieve this goal if you were no longer in a relationship with your partner?	5.3	1.9
With Alternatives	How much can someone other than your partner help you to achieve this goal?	4.1	2.0

Goal Dimension Items

Table 2

Goal Dimension	Investment Model Construct	Coefficient to the Investment Model Construct	Indirect to Commitment Coefficient
Facilitation	Satisfaction	.42***	.19***
Facilitation	Investment	.20***	.08***
Facilitation	Alternatives	-.28***	.05**
Impediment	Satisfaction	-.18***	-.08***
Impediment	Alternatives	.14***	-.03*
Without Partner	Investment	-.10*	-.04*
Without Partner	Alternatives	.20***	-.04**
With Alternatives	Satisfaction	-.12**	-.05**
With Alternatives	Investment	-.18***	-.07***
With Alternatives	Alternatives	.16***	-.03**

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Standardized Coefficients of Direct Paths to Investment Model Constructs and Indirect Paths to Commitment in Model 1

Table 3

	Facilitation	Impediment	Shared	Importance to Partner	Without Partner	With Alternatives	Satisfaction	Investment	Alternatives
Facilitation									
Impediment	-.16***								
Shared	.41***	-.06							
Importance to Partner	.48***	-.13**	.51***						
Without Partner	-.23***	.08	-.33***	-.17***					
With Alternatives	-.06	.03	-.10*	-.05	.32***				
Satisfaction	.44***	-.26***	.15***	.22***	-.09*	-.12**			
Investment	.30***	-.01	.23***	.24***	-.28***	-.21***	.44***		
Alternatives	-.31***	.17***	-.12**	-.12*	.30***	.24***	-.45***	-.49***	
Commitment	.33***	-.14**	.13**	.18***	-.19***	-.16***	.69***	.58***	-.55***

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Correlation Table for Variables of Interest

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